

**Standard USHC-9:** The student will demonstrate an understanding of the social, economic, and political events that impacted the United States during the Cold War era.

**USHC 9.1** Explain the causes and effects of social and cultural changes in postwar America, including educational programs, expanding suburbanization, the emergence of the consumer culture, the secularization of society and the reemergence of religious conservatism, and the roles of women in American society. (H, E)

**Taxonomy Level:** 2.2-B Understand/ Conceptual Knowledge

**Previous/future knowledge:**

In 5<sup>th</sup> grade, students summarized the impact of cultural developments in the United States following World War II, including the significance of pop culture and mass media and the population shifts to the suburbs (5-5.1). They studied the changes in the United States economy, including the expanding job market and service industry, consumerism, and new technology (5-5.2).

In 8<sup>th</sup> grade, students summarized the significant aspects of economic growth experienced by South Carolina during and following World War II, including the contributions of Governor Strom Thurmond in promoting growth; the creation of the State Development Board and the technical education system; the benefits of good road systems, a sea port, and the Savannah River site the scarcity of labor unions (8-7.1) and the expanding role of tourism in South Carolina's economy (8-7.2).

**It is essential for students to know:**

**Educational programs** expanded as a result of postwar conditions. Veterans returning from war took advantage of the GI Bill [Servicemen's Readjustment Act] to attend colleges and trade schools thus providing a more educated and skilled work force that would, in turn, promote economic and cultural growth in the postwar period. The end of the Great Depression and World War II and the prosperity of the 1950s contributed to an explosion in the birthrate. This baby boom led to an increase in the number of school age children and placed a strain on the educational system so that new schools were needed. The Cold War, intensified by the launch of Sputnik in 1957, resulted in an increased emphasis on quality **education**, especially in science and math. Prosperity allowed young people to stay in school longer and more young women attended college.

Returning veterans who married and began families needed more housing, spurring **suburbanization**. The baby boom of the late 1940s and 1950s also contributed to the growth of suburbia. The GI Bill made available federal loan guarantees to veterans buying homes or starting new businesses. The wide availability of the automobile and the expansion of highways by the national government [Federal Defense Highway Act] during the Eisenhower administration accelerated the growth of suburbs. Shopping malls, motels and fast food restaurants followed. Population shifts during and after World War II contributed to white flight from the cities and also spurred suburbanization. As a result of the concentration of war industries in cities of the Northeast and the west coast, many African Americans moved from the South during the war and continued to move in the 1950s and 1960s to escape poverty and racism. As middle and upper class people moved to the suburbs, so did jobs and businesses, leaving the cities with high unemployment, limited services and a shrinking tax base. This set the stage for the race riots of the 1960s.

Pent-up demand for consumer goods that were unaffordable during the Depression years and unavailable during wartime created markets for a wide array of goods and services and helped to recreate a **consumer culture**. The baby boom also contributed to the expanding consumer culture as parents bought items designed specifically for their growing families. Demand led to an increase in production, more jobs and consequently an economic boom during the 1950s. The Cold War also contributed to economic growth

as the government spent more money on weapons systems and the growing defense industries hired workers. Americans had the highest standard of living in the world by the end of the 1950s. The expanding consumer economy offered more jobs in ‘white-collar’ occupations such as clerical, professional or managerial positions in sales, advertising, insurance and communications rather than traditional ‘blue-collar’ manufacturing jobs. As middle class Americans had more money to spend, businesses offered more products to buy and advertised through expanding print and TV mediums as well as billboards along new highways. TV played a significant role in fostering the consumer culture and promoting a ‘buy now, pay later’ mentality that fostered a heavy use of credit cards, first introduced in the 1950s, which resulted in rising consumer debt.

The postwar development of the consumer culture helped to produce a **secularization of society** and a reaction against this secularization in a **reemergence of religious conservatism**. Supreme Court rulings outlawing prayer in public school and allowing abortion, the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, the sexual revolution and other “challenges” to the moral fiber of America led to the establishment of religious organizations that supported conservative positions on political, social and moral issues. Fundamentalist televangelists founded churches and educational institutions and used the power of television to raise money to support them. By the 1970s, they developed political organizations such as the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition to support ‘moral’ candidates, such as Ronald Reagan, who opposed abortion, took ‘pro-family’ positions and opposed the increasing role of the welfare state. For clarity of historical chronology, this portion of the indicator may be taught after teaching the civil rights movement (USHC 9.5).

Changes that took place on the home front during World War II such as the expansion of the **role of women** in the workplace (Rosie the Riveter) and the opportunities for African Americans in war both in the armed services and in industry [Federal Fair Employment Practices Board] helped to lay the foundation for the women’s rights and the African American civil rights movements of the postwar period. Women were displaced from their wartime jobs by returning veterans. In the late 1940s and 1950s, many returned to traditional roles of wife and mother. The consumer culture impacted the role of women as increasingly their role as the chief consumer of the family was emphasized through advertising. Media, both TV and print, glorified the role of the traditional homemaker. Suburban living increased women’s sense of isolation and many found consumerism unfulfilling. Although 40% of women held jobs outside of the home by 1960, their career opportunities were limited to nursing, teaching, domestic service, social work, retail sales and secretarial work. Few women were promoted to managerial positions and women’s pay was a fraction of what men earned. As more young women graduated from college, they were frustrated by their inability to find and advance in jobs that matched their skills. The publication of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Freidan in the early 1960s helped launch the modern women’s rights movement. The women’s rights movement will be more fully explored in USHC 9.5.

#### **It is not essential for students to know**

Students do not need to know the details of the GI Bill, such as that it provided a year’s worth of unemployment benefits. They also do not need to understand other impacts of the returning veterans on society such as high divorce rate or high unemployment. The end of wartime wage and price controls and the high demand for limited consumer products led to skyrocketing inflation are also factors that need not be studied. They do not need to understand the resulting labor unrest, such as the controversy involving Truman and the steel strike or the Taft-Hartley Act and Truman’s veto. They need not understand that the postwar period saw the emergence of conglomerates and franchises as business forms in the new consumer economy or ushered in planned obsolescence and the use of psychology in advertising.

Students do not need to know that suburbs were also the product of the innovations of builders such as William Levitt or that Levittowns were a symbol of the conformity of the post war period. Although students should understand the impact of TV on consumerism and conformity, the role of women and the

civil right movement (USHC- 9.5), they do not need to know the names of particular TV shows that illustrate this development.

Although students should be aware that there was some resistance to the consumer conformity of the post war period, they do not need to know particulars such as specific pieces of literature or films or the beat movement and the emergence of rock and roll. They do not need to know about Ralph Nader and the consumer protection movement

Students do not need to know specifics of the role of religion. The 1950s saw a resurgence of religious piety motivated in part by the atheism of communism. In the 1950s, religion was inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance with the addition of the words “under God” and onto our money with the words “In God We Trust.” Conservatives supported teaching the creation theory as opposed to Darwinism, as they had in the 1920s. Students do not need to remember that the civil rights movement for gay and lesbian rights helped to foster the emergence of the conservative religious political movement, nor that this period of religious resurgence is sometimes called the Third Great Awakening. Students do not need to know the names of postwar religious leaders such as Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell or Pat Robertson, the scandals that plagued other televangelists, nor the emergence of religious cults of the counterculture period.

It is not necessary for students to remember the names of the many women who fostered the movement for women’s rights such as Bella Abzug, Gloria Steinem, and Shirley Chisholm. However, students should understand that many women were involved.

**Assessment guidelines:**

Appropriate assessments will require students to **explain** the causes and effects of social and cultural changes in postwar America. Students should be able to **summarize**, **classify** and **identify** examples of key social and cultural changes in the period. Students should be able to **interpret** maps, graphs and political cartoons and **infer** their relationship to information about the time period. They should be able to **interpret** the significance of these changes and **infer** their impact on the role of women in society and **explain** the religious response to these changes.